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¶11. (SBU) This cable is the third in a series of elections snapshots designed to provide a sense of the local environment in the run up to the elections planned for 2007. In-depth information will continue to be reported in septels, with the snapshot format being used to convey interesting and pertinent anecdotes or facts. Post welcomes any comments or suggestions.

CONVENTIONS AND CANDIDATES

¶12. (SBU) Former Head of State Major-General Muhammadu Buhari launched his presidential campaign on December 8. Buhari is drawing on his previous time in office, billing himself as a "clean" government candidate. Most of those attending his campaign launch were Muslims from northern Nigeria, although there was a contingent from Bayelsa and Rivers states, and there was a significant presence of police and State Security Service (SSS) agents. Supporters complained that problems with permits forced the venue to a smaller facility than originally planned and busloads of supporters were prevented from entering Abuja to attend the launch.

¶13. (SBU) The ANPP, a possible platform for General Buhari, has had difficulty setting a venue for it's nominating convention. The convention was originally scheduled for December 16-17 in Eagle Square, but ANPP was forced to change because of the December 16 PDP convention at the same location. Over the span of a few days, the convention moved to Jos, to Kano, then back to Eagle Square but on December 18-19. A well placed observer tells us the move from Kano was precipitated by a call from President Obasanjo to the governor of Kano State to say he "could not guarantee the security" of the convention in Kano.

¶14. (SBU) A faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) held its convention in Enugu on December 2 and selected Chief Odimegwu Ojukwu as its Presidential candidate.

At present, the APGA has two distinct factions, the first being the "official" faction recognized by INEC and led by Chief Umeh, a loyalist to Ojukwu, and the second led by

Chekwas Okorie, the first chairman of APGA, who is believed to currently be at loggerheads with both President Obasanjo and Ojukwu. While the first faction selected Chief Ojukwu as its candidate, members of the second faction are reportedly seeking an alliance with other parties and will likely back either Buhari or Vice President Atiku. (NOTE: In the 2003 elections, the APGA became the fourth party in Nigeria -- behind the PDP, ANPP, and AD. Although APGA was unable to produce a governor at in the 2003 elections, it finally won Anambra State in March 2006.) (See also Lagos Septel.)

15. (SBU) One day ahead of the December 16 PDP Convention, "This Day" newspaper reports Katsina State Governor Umar Yar'Adua and former National Security Advisor General Aliyu Gusau are the strongest contenders for the PDP nomination, calling Yar'Adua the "clear frontrunner." The PDP Screening Committee announced on December 14 that it has cleared the following candidates for the PDP Convention: Yar'Adua, Gusau, former Chief of Staff Mike Akhigbe, Mrs. Sarah Jibril, Professor Jerry Gana, Ambassador Ralph Uweche, Senator A.P. Sawa, Major General Mamman Kotangora, Chief A.K. Horsefall, Owelle Rochas Okorocha, Brigadier-General Buba Marwa, Governor Sam Egwu, Governor Achike Udenwa, Governor Adamu Muazu, Governor Donald Duke, Governor Victor Attah, Governor Peter Odili, Governor Adamu Abdullahi, and Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe.

PARTY NEWS

16. (SBU) The People's Salvation Party (PSP) elected Dr. Junnaiju Mohammed, a Russian trained neurosurgeon and Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in the Second Republic, as party chairman. PSP is seen as an alternative platform for General Buhari in the event that things do not

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work out with the ANPP. (NOTE: Given Dr. Junnaiju's experience, it is generally expected that he will be a strong organizer of the progressive community. The party is mostly comprised of northern radicals and a few conservatives who have been marginalized by the present administration.)

17. (SBU) The Action Congress (AC) has emerged as an amalgamation of splinter groups from the AD, PDP, and other parties, with Atiku as its likely presidential candidate. Its recent party congress selected a former Governor, Bisi Akande, as its chairman and former Steel Minister under Abacha Bashiru Dalhatu as its National Secretary. (NOTE: The driving forces behind the AC are Vice President Atiku Abubakar, former North-Central PDP stalwarts such as Chief Solomon Lar and Audu Ogbeh, and South-West big men such as Governor Tinubu of Lagos State. Also involved in the AC are former Alliance for Democracy (AD) governors of Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, and Osun states who feel betrayed over a deal with Obasanjo in which AD governors reportedly agreed to support Obasanjo's presidency in 2003 in return for assurance they would retain their gubernatorial posts.)

STATE POLITICS

18. (SBU) For the third time in three weeks, the Secretariat of the Delta State PDP was hit by a bomb blast in the early morning hours of December 12. Two police officers were critically injured and there was reportedly significant fire damage to the complex before the blaze was brought under control. Several other explosions have occurred in the state as well.

VOTER REGISTRATION

¶9. (SBU) The December 14 deadline for completion of the voter registration has officially passed. INEC has announced plans to allow voters holding a registration card from the 2003 elections to "revalidate" their registration. This revalidation exercise is expected to continue until late January, allowing a couple of weeks for compilation of the lists before mandated publication on February 14. The process of "revalidation" of 2003 voter registration cards remains unclear and no information has been provided to the public.

¶10. (SBU) This Day reported on December 13 that 10 million of 58 million eligible voters have been registered under the new electronic registration system; however, most post contacts believe this number is inflated.

¶11. (SBU) On December 14, the House of Representatives passed amendments to the 2006 Electoral Law. Specifically, the amendments extend the period for conducting voter registration to 45 days prior to the general election and explicitly outlaw the use of direct data capture machine registration, mandating instead that INEC begin the process of registration via manual registration. The Bill, which passed quickly after a vote to suspend requirements for a first and second reading, was passed to the Senate for consideration.

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